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Thompson's Luck



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THOMPSON'S LUCK

BY
HARRY GREENWOOD GROVER



STEWART KIDD
MODERN PLAYS

No. 19

EDITED BY
FRANK SHAY

Stewart Kidd Modern Plays

Edited by FRANK SHAY

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No. 19

STEWART KIDD MODERN PLAYS

Edited by Frank Shay

THOMPSON'S LUCK

PLAYS FOR A FOLDING THEATRE

By *Colin Campbell Clements*

Frontispiece by Ralph Barton

The seven plays contained in this book can be produced in any theatre and on any stage, no matter how inflexible. There are three Pierrot-Columbine plays, three plays of the East, and one of the sea—all of them artistic and planned, as the title suggests, for production on small stages. For several of the plays Mr. Clements has designed sets. **Three Lepers of Suk-El-Garab** is being produced this winter in the new French Theatre in Beyrouth, Syria, where Mr. Clements was living when he wrote the play several years ago.

The plays are: **Pierrot in Paris.** A morality play in one act, the moral being that he also sees who only sits and sits. In a little French café one night all life comes to Pierrot . . . and passes him by. 20 minutes. (2 m. 3 w.) **Columbine.** A play in one act, wherein is shown that Love's experience can't teach Love's inexperience nor thwart its verdant hope. 25 minutes. (2 w.) **The Return of Harlequin.** A play in one act, with Harlequin just returned from the war and face to face with an unexpected adventure—a little Harlequin. 20 minutes. (1 m. 1 w.) **Three Lepers of Suk-El-Garab.** A drama in one act, with all the color, music, and fatalism of the East. 25 minutes. (3 m.) **The Desert.** A drama in one act, based on an old Arabic legend told to the author one day in Damascus by an Arab sheik. 25 minutes. (3 m. 6 w.) **The Siege.** A drama in one act, on an actual experience in Arabia in 1920. *Henry Bordeaux*, of the French Academy, says of it: "I should like to see it done in French. Mr. Clements makes one feel that thing that is the East." 20 minutes. (3 w.) **Moon Tide.** A play in one act in which the sea "crawlin' up out of the black mud" avenges the murder of Old Hank, who "loved her as if she was human flesh and blood." 20 minutes. (2 m.)

Silk Cloth. 165 pages. 12mo. \$2.00.

¾ Turkey Morocco, \$7.50.

STEWART KIDD

PUBLISHERS

THOMPSON'S LUCK

A Tragedy in One Act

By

HARRY GREENWOOD GROVER



CINCINNATI
STEWART KIDD COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

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[Printed in the United States of America
THE CAXTON PRESS

PS
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1923

CHARACTERS

STEPHEN THOMPSON

JANE, *his Wife*

WATERMAN HOLMES } *Neighbors*

HIRAM PRATT }

The author acknowledges his indebtedness for the central idea of this play to Ben Ames Williams, whose story, "THEY GRIND EXCEEDING SMALL," suggested the play.

THOMPSON'S LUCK

SCENE I

The interior of a very plain farmhouse kitchen, forenoon of a gray winter day. At the right there is a kitchen range, with tea kettle and iron pot. Right front, door to pantry. Back center, the sink in front of a window; a pump at right end, large water-pail at the other, with tin dipper hanging over it; at left, shelves, and along the wall at right more shelves and a corner cupboard. A plain table is in the center of room, with two equally plain chairs by it. There is a door, back left, which reveals, as it opens later to admit the neighbor, that it is the only one leading outdoors, although it must be through one of those shed-like contrivances, so frequent in New England, that stretch from house to barn, for, when the door opens, only a darkening results. On the left wall there is a door which leads to the "down-stairs" bedroom; near this door is an old-fashioned wooden cradle; the hooded sort, with rockers. It is turned with head towards audience.

At the rise, a thin, faded, small woman of thirty-five is washing dishes at the sink. When she walks, she is a little twisted over to one side: one limb is drawn up a little so she stands on her toes. An oldish-looking, gray-haired, stoop-shouldered, and sharp-faced man, with sunken, small, gray eyes, bushy overhanging brow, is seated in the center pulling off rubber boots; and, as the conversation

THOMPSON'S LUCK

proceeds, putting on black, shiny, greased, knee-length leather boots. The woman turns round from her work, looks at him and sighs.

THOMPSON

Want anything to the store?

MRS. THOMPSON (*sadly*)

Are you going to town today?

THOMPSON

Yes. (*Sharply.*) What's going to hinder?

MRS. THOMPSON (*turning and wiping dish as she talks, half apologetically—as if she did not feel it her right to question or dispute with her lord and master*)

I thought mebbe that the going and the—

THOMPSON

The going? When did going ever stop me?

MRS. THOMPSON

Yes, I know. (*Falteringly, as if she had more to say; but she doesn't get any further.*)

THOMPSON (*vigorously*)

I guess so. No storm is going to stop me from getting to town; there is two men owe me interest money that will be in today to my office. That's how I got my money, putting it out and taking care to get it back. (*He laughs very slightly, a little cackling, thin laugh without any joy in it.*)

MRS. THOMPSON

Aren't you afraid it's going to storm?

THOMPSON

No, I'm not afraid of anything! It isn't my luck to have a storm. Don't you believe what

THOMPSON'S LUCK

folks around here tell you about Thompson's luck. Mebbe some of my folks was unlucky, but it don't follow me. (*He chuckles a little, holding one boot in his hand; he looks at her.*) You know yourself what folks said when I married you. (*Mrs. Thompson turns with a pained expression, as if she does not care to hear what she knows so well. Thompson continues, looking away so that he doesn't see the look of pain.*) Thompson's luck again! Waited until he was an old man, then married a crooked stick. (*He chuckles again, not seeing the look of hatred on her face, pulls on his boot and looks up towards her.*) But we fooled 'em. (*He rises, goes over to the cradle, kneels before it, and looks in, pushing away a bit of the blanket that covers the child within.*) Who's got a finer boy than Steve Thompson? (*Turning to her anxiously.*) What makes him sleep so much?

MRS. THOMPSON

He's got cold.

THOMPSON

Pshaw, why should he have a cold? (*Rising.*) He'll be all right. I won't have him sick!

MRS. THOMPSON

Don't you think you better get the medicine? He seemed worse last night.

(*Thompson goes over, takes a coat from a hook by the door, and takes things from its pockets and puts them into another coat, which hangs there. While he is fumblingly doing this he goes on with his talking.*)

THOMPSON'S LUCK

THOMPSON

Didn't I buy medicine last week?

MRS. THOMPSON

But that was another trouble. We can't use that for this.

THOMPSON

He won't be sick.

MRS. THOMPSON (*sighing*)

I hope not, but I am afraid.

THOMPSON

You ain't afraid to spend money, I notice.

MRS. THOMPSON

But, Steve, if he needs it, you wouldn't mind spending money?

THOMPSON

But he'll be all right, I say, Can't anything happen to my boy!

(A knock at the door is heard.)

THOMPSON (*without looking around*)

Come in.

(There enters a quiet, smiling man, with a smooth, red face, and a soft voice. He is bundled up in a big coat, with heavy mittens; a cap is pulled over his ears. He is younger looking than Thompson.)

HOLMES (*quietly*)

So you're going, are you?

THOMPSON (*sharply*)

Didn't I just telephone you I was?

THOMPSON'S LUCK

HOLMES (*smiling*)

Well—(*and seeing Mrs. Thompson over in the corner*) Good morning, Miss Thompson.

MRS. THOMPSON (*nods*)

Don't you think it's going to be a blizzard?

HOLMES (*doubtfully*)

I don't know.

THOMPSON

She's afraid of Thompson's luck. Guess she heard of it before she ever came over here to keep house for me. Wouldn't think she'd marry me, would you? (*Bitterly, fumbling in his pocket and not looking up.*) Old man and crooked stick!

MRS. THOMPSON

Steve!

THOMPSON (*laughing, turns to Holmes*)

Have you seen my boy?

HOLMES

Not since yesterday. (*Smiling.*) Is he grown up? (*He looks at Mrs. Thompson, who smiles faintly.*)

(*Thompson going over to cradle, pulls back the quilt a little; although Holmes has followed him, he speaks to himself.*)

THOMPSON

A fine boy! A fine boy! (*He gets up.*) Thompson's luck! It never hit me!

HOLMES (*dryly*)

It never does hit more than once, does it?

THOMPSON'S LUCK

THOMPSON (*angrily*)

You believe in it, too, do you?

HOLMES (*quietly*)

Oh, no, I don't believe in any luck. I think, as a man sows, he will reap.

THOMPSON

Humph! (*Contemptuously.*) You think my grandfather was struck by lightning just because, after the big tree in the yard was split to kindling, he said, "Now, try Thompson!"

HOLMES

Well, I don't know.

THOMPSON

I do! But they don't hit me, I tell ye. (*He has by now dressed, and goes into the pantry, off right, returning with a basket into which he looks, turning to his wife.*) Only two dozen eggs today? Why, I brought in seven yesterday.

MRS. THOMPSON (*meekly*)

I sold a dozen day before yesterday.

THOMPSON

You did! (*Winking at Holmes.*) Where's the money?

MRS. THOMPSON (*not seeing the joke*)

You said I might keep it.

THOMPSON

That's why I asked; to see if you keep it or spend it. (*He laughs a cynical laugh in which no one joins him. Holmes looks uneasy.*) Well! (*To Holmes*) Come on. (*He goes to the water-pail at the sink, takes down the tin dipper, drinks from it, puts back the dipper, draws*

THOMPSON'S LUCK

from his trousers' pocket a black plug of tobacco, from which he bites, and returns it to his pocket.)

MRS. THOMPSON (*who has been standing nervously wiping a pan over and over again, now gets up her courage to speak.*)

Don't you think you better get the medicine? If anything should happen—

THOMPSON (*interrupting*)

Nonsense! I'm going to town to get money, not to spend it. He isn't sick. I won't have him sick! (*Turns to go, takes the latch of the door in his hand, then back over his shoulder with*) Take good care of my boy! Keep him warm! Care and warmth is what he needs. (*He goes out, followed by Holmes who simply nods as he goes through the door.*)

(Mrs. Thompson stands by the sink, looking out the window, until there is heard outside, Thompson's voice calling, "Whoa! hold up!" Then there is a sharp jingling of sleigh-bells succeeded by quiet, and she moves a step or two, evidently to follow better with her eyes, the retreating sleigh. She mechanically puts down the pan which she has continued to hold and wipe, and stands there with the dish-towel in her hand. She turns and looks toward the cradle, then out of the window suddenly as if he had come in sight again on some far hill-top.)

MRS. THOMPSON (*raising her hand threateningly*)

It will be your fault! (*She limps over to the cradle, kneels by it, remains there as if listen-*

THOMPSON'S LUCK

ing. She gets up quickly, goes to the table with great determination, makes something in a cup, goes back to the cradle, and exclaims feverishly:) I won't let him die! His boy, and he won't spend a penny for medicine! He's my boy, too, and I won't let him die. *(She puts the cup back on the table, goes to the stove, takes a brick from the top of the stove, wraps it in a large piece of cloth, carries it to the cradle, pulls up the covering at the foot, and, while putting it in, talks frantically.)* His baby! I'll show him! He wouldn't have him die! I will not let him die! His mother will save him. He's my boy! Another crooked stick! *(She shrieks hysterically; buries her face in her hands, sobbing uncontrollably.)*

SCENE II

The curtain falls for an instant to rise on the same scene with this difference. The room is filled with queer shadows made by the light from a poor, little lamp on the table. There is a large rocking-chair near the table which has been moved to the middle of the room. The shades are drawn. The cradle is over near the stove. The oven door is open and Mrs. Thompson, propped up in the chair with a red, faded shawl over her shoulders, is seated before it. She wakens with a start at some distant, low call heard outside.

MRS. THOMPSON

Oh! (She steps over near the cradle and listens; looks up at the clock on the mantle over the stove.)

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Half-past twelve. (*A weak knock is heard at the door. She rises quickly, limps over to the door, and, with her hand on the bar, which locks the door, she calls timorously:*) Who's there? (*A weak man's voice heard outside.*) It's me. (*To which Mrs. Thompson adds with assurance and eagerness:*) Hiram Pratt? (*Before the "yes" comes she has taken down the bar and with it the door is opened, disclosing a thin, tall, stooped man; clad in a poor-looking, old, faded overcoat; a cap pulled down over his narrow head; a big strip of cloth wound round his thin, long neck.*)

MRS. THOMPSON

Well, I'm glad you've come.

PRATT (*staggers to the chair; at the left of the table; sits down as if exhausted; in a weak voice says*)
Baby worse?

MRS. THOMPSON

Yes, awful; but I'll save him with the medicine.

(*Pratt begins unbuttoning his coat; then another beneath it; and, at last, painfully draws something out of his trouser's side-pocket, which Jane reaches eagerly for.*)

PRATT

I didn't fetch it, Miss Thompson. I'm sorry!

(*His speech is broken off by a spasm of coughing. Her hands have fallen limp at her side, and from now, during the recital, she stands mute and sometimes as if unconscious of his story or presence, until he comes to the part Thompson had played; at which, for a moment, she shows signs of a re-*

THOMPSON'S LUCK

pressed rage, which suggests strength that lies hidden beneath her pitifully weak, habitual exterior.)

PRATT

You see! (*He holds out a small, dirty, white canvas bag, such as country men use to carry loose change.*) I put that dollar bill you gave me to buy the medicine in here with my money and tied this tape around it just as I always do. (*He shows the bag folded securely, with the open end turned in and a soiled piece of white tape turned around it.*) It couldn't have got lost, could it? (*Appealing to Mrs. Thompson.*) Do you see how it could?

MRS. THOMPSON (*shakes her head*)

No!

PRATT

I thought I'd do my interest business first, before I went to the store to trade. I got my mortgage on my place from Mr. Thompson, you know.

MRS. THOMPSON

No, I didn't know.

PRATT

Yes, so I went right to the office. My! but it was warm up there: up those stairs. You know how it is.

MRS. THOMPSON

No, I've never seen it.

PRATT

Hain't seen it?

THOMPSON'S LUCK

MRS. THOMPSON

No, I never go to town.

PRATT

Come to think of it, I don't know as I ever did see you there; but I supposed mebbe the old man took you sometimes.

MRS. THOMPSON

No, he never has room.

PRATT

I see he had Waterman Holmes.

MRS. THOMPSON

Yes, Waterman went. (*Weakly.*) But the baby was sick.

PRATT

Waterman was there when I went in; though I was kind of blinded when I first got in, I soon made out who it was and I knew his voice. I felt so kind of queer up there, climbing the stairs and the heat and all, and my fingers were so cold, I couldn't scarce count my money. But I finally got out the \$11.40 that I had. It was not enough, but Mr. Thompson took it and let me have a little more time for the rest. (*He coughs terribly.*) This has been a tough winter, all the children sick with colds and one thing or another. (*He sighs, shakes his head.*) I don't know. (*He remains silent for what seems a long time, until brought back to his story by the cold voice of Jane.*)

MRS. THOMPSON

And then?

THOMPSON'S LUCK

PRATT (*starting up*)

Oh, yes! Well, I thought it wouldn't do any harm as long as I had so much bad luck, poor crops and a calf that died, and so on, to ask Mr. Thompson if he wouldn't let me off a little. (*He sighs again.*)

MRS. THOMPSON (*quickly and mechanically*)

What did he say?

PRATT

I suppose I can't compalin. I told him I had a big family and had lots of sickness, and he said he had a family, too, to look out for. "I know," says I. (*He pauses, looks at the cradle and around the room.*) So I got up and come out, and when I got over to the store for the medicine, the dollar bill was gone. (*He pauses and looks at Jane as if looking for some sharp scolding or word of question, perhaps of sympathy, but, seeing nothing but a stare on her face, he continues pitifully.*) I always put my money in that bag, but I thought I might have put it in some back pocket, seeing it wasn't my money.

MRS. THOMPSON

And you couldn't find it in your pocket?

PRATT

I hunted in every pocket I've got. Zack Turner finally spoke up and asked me if I had come to town to clean out my pockets. I couldn't find that dollar, Miss Thompson. I'll pay you back soon as I can. Mebbe in a month I'll get it. Will that be all right? I'm sorry. (*He rises and begins fumblingly buttoning his coat.*)

THOMPSON'S LUCK

MRS. THOMPSON (*as if awakening to reality*)

It ain't the money; it's the medicine. (*She goes over and kneels by the cradle.*) What will become of my boy? (*She sobs.*)

PRATT (*weakly*)

I guess he'll be a'right. Harriet could come over tomorrow and help you, mebbe.

MRS. THOMPSON

Tomorrow?

PRATT

Well, if it stops snowin'.

MRS. THOMPSON (*as if to herself*)

Mebbe Steve bought it and will bring it.

PRATT

Steve won't be out tonight.

MRS. THOMPSON

Oh, yes, he will. He would have telephoned to find out about the boy if he didn't mean to come home.

PRATT

Telephoned! There hain't three lengths of telephone wire between here and Batesville.

MRS. THOMPSON

Then he'll come. (*Faintly, as if she did not believe it.*) I guess.

PRATT

If there's anything I could do—I'm afraid he won't come.

MRS. THOMPSON

You got through.

THOMPSON'S LUCK

PRATT

Yes, but I had to. There was Harriet and the children.

MRS. THOMPSON

He's got a family, too.

PRATT

Yes, but he can afford to stay in town. He can go to the hotel.

MRS. THOMPSON

Not him. He sleeps in his office sometimes when he's kept in late. (*She looks at the cradle.*) But he'll come before mornin'. (*As if to herself.*) He said he wouldn't let him die.

PRATT

Humph! He don't believe in Thompson's luck. Well, I hope not. (*Turning to go.*) I'm sorry, Miss Thompson. I must be going.

(He goes, and she mechanically bars the door after him. Now she seems awake, as if she realizes that the child has no hope but her resources. She wraps up another brick taken from the stove, takes the one from the cradle, and puts in the freshly heated one. Her every movement is feverish; at times, frantic. She stoops over very close as if to listen for the breathing of the child. She rises, limpingly fetches the lamp, kneels by the cradle, turns up the wick until it smokes and seems to peer into the face of the child within. She puts the lamp back on the table, mixes at the table something in a cup, puts it down, goes over to the telephone, takes down the receiver, and, after a pause, calls faintly:)

THOMPSON'S LUCK

MRS. THOMPSON

Hello! (*Pause.*) Hello! (*A longer pause in which she moves nervously, as if she heard strange sounds or perhaps no sound in the receiver.*) Hello! (*Then, frantically*) Hello! Hello! Hello! (*The receiver drops the full length of the cord from her hand, she turns slowly round; falls into a chair and laughs hysterically.*) It's coming now. Thompson's luck!

Curtain

SCENE III

When the curtain rises after a brief interval, it is to disclose the kitchen flooded with a dazzling sunlight reflected from the snow-covered world outside. It is mid-forenoon of the day following the previous events. The table is still out in the center of the room, but the cradle is gone. The back door opens and in walks Thompson, followed by Waterman Holmes.

THOMPSON (*over his shoulder*)

You might as well come in. We'll have something hot to drink.

(Loosening their coats, they sit at the table; Thompson toward the stove and away from the bedroom door. From the bedroom door Jane comes quickly. She has a strained look, is pale, with deep circles under her eyes.)

MRS. THOMPSON

At last!

THOMPSON'S LUCK

THOMPSON (*not looking at her; speaking over his shoulder*)

This isn't late. We're early. (*Looking at his watch.*) Only ten o'clock. Give us a cup of coffee, will you?

(*Mrs. Thompson, without answering, goes over to the shelf by the window, takes a spoon, a jar of coffee, and puts water from pail into the coffee-pot.*)

THOMPSON (*continuing*)

It turned out to be a big storm. I didn't see any good spending money to telephone. I see the wires are all down anyhow. I knew you would be all right; you aren't afraid.

(*Jane pauses in her preparations, looks at him with a sudden look of hatred coming over her face, but says nothing.*)

THOMPSON (*continuing*)

Never see such drifts, did you, Waterman?

HOLMES

No!

THOMPSON

Couldn't have got through last night no more than you could fly.

MRS. THOMPSON

Some did

THOMPSON (*turning around and looking at her*)

Who?

MRS. THOMPSON

Hiram Pratt.

THOMPSON'S LUCK

THOMPSON (*laughing his dry, cackling laugh*)

He couldn't do anything but go through. No place to stay and no money to put up at the hotel. (*Turning to Waterman.*) Mebbe that dollar bill he dropped at my table was his hotel expenses. (*He slaps his knee and laughs so he doesn't hear the coffee-pot come down with a thud on the shelf at the side of the sink, when Jane's nerveless hand lets it drop as she hears "dollar bill." Waterman Holmes looks around, but, as Jane manages to pick it up and go on, he turns back. Thompson continues to Jane, who now stands with her back to him.*) He was into my office yesterday afternoon to pay up his interest and dropped a dollar bill on the table while he was counting out his chicken feed to make up his \$11.40. (*Turning to Holmes.*) Guess he must have saved all the change he's seen for the last six months. He did have two silver dollars, though. (*He laughs again and then resumes to Jane.*) Well, sir, he's got so little brains that, while he was counting and recounting his small change to make sure he wasn't giving me too much, he let a dollar bill slip out on the table, and, with his eyes looking straight at that table, setting there as near as Holmes and I are to this one, he never saw me cover it up with my hand (*imitating on table*) and put it in my pocket. (*He bursts out laughing. Holmes smiles a little, but stops as he perceives Jane's queer look when she hears "dollar bill."*)

HOLMES

It was too bad, though.

THOMPSON'S LUCK

THOMPSON (*snorting*)

Too bad, nothing! Dum fool! Why didn't he take care of his money? He ain't got brains enough to carry him around the corner let alone borrow money. (*Bitterly to Jane.*) How did you know he got back last night?

MRS. THOMPSON

He stopped here.

THOMPSON

What time?

MRS. THOMPSON

About half-past twelve.

THOMPSON

What for?

MRS. THOMPSON

I asked him to do an errand.

THOMPSON

Can't I do your errands?

MRS. THOMPSON (*doggedly*)

You wouldn't.

THOMPSON

Shucks!

MRS. THOMPSON

I asked you to buy the medicine and you said "No!"

THOMPSON

Pshaw! Did he get it?

MRS. THOMPSON

No, he couldn't.

THOMPSON

Why not?

THOMPSON'S LUCK

MRS. THOMPSON (*looking defiantly at him*)

He lost the money I gave him.

THOMPSON

Lost the money? Stole it, you mean. How much did you give him?

MRS. THOMPSON (*defiantly, looking sharply at him*)

A dollar bill! (*Holmes stands up; Thompson jumps to his feet, starts toward the bedroom door, stops, turns around and asks, with a tremor in his voice:*)

THOMPSON

How's my boy?

MRS. THOMPSON (*pointing to the door of the bedroom*)

Go and see!

THOMPSON (*goes slowly, but before he reaches the door turns again and says*)

How's my boy?

MRS. THOMPSON

Dead!

CURTAIN

THREE MODERN JAPANESE PLAYS

Translated by

Yozan T. Iwasaki and Glenn Hughes

THESE short plays, while different one from the other, are the direct result of Western influences and are representative of the new drama movement in Japan, which is, not supplanting, but very decidedly challenging the *No*, the *Kabuki*, and the *Doll-play*.

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